



News & Events

University News & Information

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California

April 16, 2004

Factsheet: Cal Poly-Cotchett Initiative in Science and Math Teacher Education

Q: What is the purpose of the Cal Poly-Cotchett initiative in science and mathematics teacher education?

A: The aim of the initiative is to help increase the number of credentialed teachers of math and science in underserved regions of the state. California has a total of 37,300 teachers who have not yet met California's qualifications for even a preliminary teaching credential. Of these, 27% are math and science teachers.

Low-income area students are nearly three times more likely to be taught by under-prepared teachers than students from more affluent areas. Students in the lowest-achieving schools, measured by the state's Academic Performance Index, are 4.5 times more likely to face under-prepared teachers than students in the highest-achieving schools.

Q: What are the program elements of the Cal Poly-Cotchett Initiative?

A: The initiative aims to develop programs to help ease the critical shortage of credentialed math and science teachers in underserved areas, as well as to serve as a model for other universities in their related efforts. The most innovative elements of the initiative include:

- Cotchett Fellows Program for teachers who commit to working a minimum of two years in designated under-represented school districts. Fellows will receive a stipend during their credential year at Cal Poly, which will continue through their first two years of teaching.
- Summer Institute will bring teachers in math and science from around the state to Cal Poly for one to two weeks of intensive professional development to update their content knowledge and skills. Teachers will be given a stipend, room and board during their stay at Cal Poly.
- Other program elements include a specialized summers-only master's program, scholarships for students in their credential year at Cal Poly, a new teaching laboratory, and an endowed professorship in science and mathematics teacher education.

Q: Who is eligible to participate in these programs?

A: The Summer Institute will be open to teachers statewide who need to update their math and science backgrounds. Fellowship applicants should demonstrate an interest in teaching in K-8 or in secondary math or science in an underserved area of the state. Scholarship applicants should plan to become K-8 teachers or secondary-school science or math teachers. Teachers interested in the summers-only master's degree program will seek advanced intensive study in their field of teaching.

Q: Why focus on science and math teachers? Why not all teachers?

A: California students rank at or near the bottom among states participating in national standardized tests in math and science, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Yet, the state's economy is comprised of a high concentration of science and technology businesses, requiring a continuous supply of science and technology leaders and innovators. This sector is also where many of the most lucrative job opportunities are, so it is only fair that people of all socio-economic backgrounds be given the skills, knowledge and access needed to compete for these types of jobs.

Q: Why are Joe and Victoria Cotchett interested in this cause?

A: Joe, who was raised in New York, and Victoria, a third generation Californian, are active in numerous charitable organizations involving children, women, minorities and animal protection. Joe Cotchett, consistently named by the National Law Journal as one of the foremost trial lawyers in the nation, has spent a lifetime championing the rights of the underprivileged. Their desire for improving the education of young, low-income children is fueled by the belief that if these students are taught by the best teachers possible, and the desire for lifelong learning is sparked during the K-12 years, opportunities for a better life for them are greatly enhanced.

Q: Why did the Cotchetts choose to partner with Cal Poly?

A: Joe Cotchett received his B.S. in engineering from Cal Poly, often commenting that this hands-on education was one of the best learning experiences of his life. For 11 consecutive years, Cal Poly has been ranked as the best public, primarily undergraduate institution in the West by U.S. World News and Report. So the partnership evolved from his desire to help his alma mater in its efforts to enhance the educational opportunities available to California's students.

Q: What is the Cal Poly University Center for Teacher Education?

A: UCTE offers a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary set of programs and activities, from undergraduate blended programs through post-baccalaureate credential programs, master's degrees, and the University's first doctoral offering. UCTE has its own core faculty, as well as associated content educators and advisors from the Colleges of Science and Mathematics, Agriculture and Liberal Arts. UCTE will administer the Cotchett donation and coordinate the programs, in collaboration with the College of Science and Mathematics.

Q: We hear a lot about issues related to diversity and access to higher ed. How does this initiative address these issues?

A: The UCTE has a long history of outreach to under-represented populations. The Cotchetts have a strong belief and commitment to equity. This combination is producing an initiative that will include outreach to and partnerships with under-represented schools, in order to recruit more students from those schools to attend Cal Poly, to place more credentialed teachers in those schools, and to provide professional development for teachers from these schools.

Q: How can interested students and teachers apply for the programs?

A: Interested students and teachers may call UCTE at (805) 756-2126. Information on applying for the programs will also be available soon on the Cal Poly Web site at www.ucte.calpoly.edu/cotchett.

Click [Here](#) to return to the News Release on the Cotchetts' gift.

Editors Note: All statistics come from "The Status of the Teaching Profession 2003" report by the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, unless otherwise noted.